



Tammy DuMond, 47, Makayla DuMond, 6, and Maxwell Holcomb, 54, stand outside the van they live in with their pit bull, Chloe, and two guinea pigs, Panda and Monkey, at McKay School Park in Salem on Wednesday. The family had stayed most nights in Walmart parking lots since being evicted from their trailer home four years ago, until recently when local Walmart policy changed to no longer allow overnight parking. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

# Homeless lose option for sleeping

## Walmart stops allowing overnight parking



No-parking sign at Woodburn Walmart CHERRILL CROSBY/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Jonathan Bach Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Homeless people can no longer stay overnight in RVs, vans and cars at Walmart parking lots in the Mid-Willamette Valley after stores threatened to tow vehicles lingering past business hours.

The Bentonville, Arkansas, company traditionally has opened its parking lots to truckers seeking a good night's sleep in relative security.

But signs recently posted at Walmart stores in Salem and Woodburn warn "No overnight RV parking." The Dallas

Walmart still allows overnight parking for one night.

Homeless advocate Jimmy Jones worries losing places such as Walmart that have historically, through practice or policy, allowed people to stay overnight causes more hardship.

Living in cars is usually "the first step into homelessness," and for the hundreds of people who do so in Salem, not

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## Parking

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having a place to park safely “makes things more desperate,” said Jones, director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency ARCHES project.

Still, parking lots have a downside. Homeless advocates have heard scattered reports of people being beaten in parking lots. Theft and drug trafficking are common. “It creates a target population for that behavior,” Jones said.

Walmart leaves parking decisions to store managers, says spokeswoman Tara Aston. If the property isn’t owned by Walmart, then overnight parking is the landlord’s call, she said.

The Walmart Supercenter on Turner Road SE — the only Salem store open 24 hours — has had signs posted since 2015, but they were recently “replaced with larger, more prominent signs,” Aston said.

The store’s parking lot was the site of a 2015 shootout between Salem police and a Eugene man wanted for failing to appear in court. Mark Hawkins, 49, refused to leave a converted bus he was inside and threatened to shoot officers. After hours of negotiations, police shot and killed Hawkins.

Aston said she couldn’t comment on why stores decided to stop allowing overnight parking. “But one of our top priorities is maintaining a safe and secure environment at our stores, and this is a way to assist in that.”

Both Jones and T.J. Putman, executive director of the Salem Interfaith Hospitality Network, say they don’t refer people to stay at Walmarts.

However, Putman says the company’s policy shift compounds a broader problem: that Salem doesn’t have the resources to aid the city’s homeless community. Moreover, cars are “where we see families with children typically,” he said.

Maxwell Holcomb, Tammy DuMond and their 6-year-old daughter have been homeless for about four years, ever since they were evicted from a local trailer park after the rent rose and their fixed income couldn’t match it.

he said. Deputies wouldn’t necessarily refer someone to Walmart, Baldridge said, but it used to be an option. The Salem W aldmarts have signs from TRS 24HR Towing posted around their lots that read, “Unauthorized or improperly parked vehicles will be impounded 24 hours a day at owners risk & expense.” Despite the stiff warning, TRS proprietor Adam Price says Walmart employees tend to do all they can to encourage overnights to leave before they resort to calling his company. Employees place a notice on the car, or try to contact the vehicle’s owners, to move them along. Price has seen Walmart managers leave cars there for up to two weeks before they’ve had them towed. Some property owners around town want cars gone immediately, he said. “Walmart does not do that.” In general, TRS responds to calls about homeless peoples’ vehicles three times a week, Price estimates. Towers try not to have homeless peoples’ cars impounded, instead trying to get them to leave the property themselves, he said.

Some usual spots TRS responds to without towing vehicles are the Walmart parking lots, church parking lots, empty properties and various parking lots along Lancaster Drive.

The only times they’ve towed from Walmart are when vehicles are abandoned or when the owners have just been arrested, Price said.

*Reach staff reporter Jonathan Bach by phone at 503-399-6714 or by email at [jbach@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:jbach@statesmanjournal.com).*



**Tammy DuMond, 47, Makayla DuMond, 6, and Maxwell Holcomb, 54, have been homeless for about four years.** PHOTOS BY ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

The eviction makes it hard for landlords to let them into new housing — so the family roams around Salem in a 1981 Chevrolet G20 van.



Without a consistent place like the Walmart parking lot to sleep every night, getting their daughter to school on time requires herculean effort.

“We find other places to park now,” Holcomb says. Some businesses don’t really mind as long as you’re off the property by daybreak, he said, but the pressure is on to constantly move around.

The family used to stay at Walmart often. “It was a secured, well-lit, safe place to sleep,” DuMond said. She figures her family does most of its shopping at Walmart, buying anything from food to car supplies. “I hate them, but I love them because they’re convenient,” she said. “While we’re paying their wages, we’re being kicked off the property.” The Walmart parking lots used to be a resource for people in RVs who needed a place to stay, says Lt. Chris Baldrige with the Marion County Sheriff’s Office. “We generally don’t have a lot of places for them to go.”

But when Walmart stopped allowing overnight parking, the vehicles started showing up elsewhere in the county,

**Signs in the Walmart parking lot on Lancaster Drive NE ban overnight parking.**

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